

Reply

Towards a Progressive View of Aid, Development, and Education

Steven J. Klees

University of Maryland

I feel honored and privileged that the editors of *Current Issues in Comparative Education* decided to solicit responses to my article in this volume (Klees, 2010) and that the responses were by such thoughtful and well-regarded scholars. While there are areas of disagreement, I find that our disagreements are much less important than our commonalities. I try to detail both in my reply, but I focus on how my respondents and I share what I call a progressive perspective – even though none of them choose that particular label to describe their point of view. The meaning of a progressive perspective necessarily reflects a struggle over theory and praxis. It is constantly being formed and re-formed. The debate in this issue is part of that struggle.

Beyond Economics

Brehm and Silova's (2010) intriguing "radical reimagination" of aid argues that the "central discourse on international aid has been dominated by" economists' viewpoints and that my paper is no exception. In my paper, I did not have space enough to do more than a thumbnail sketch of the neoliberal, liberal, and progressive perspectives I used to frame the discussion of aid, education, and development. The progressive perspective, which I favor and which formed the basis for my recommendations, is not an economics perspective¹ but a remarkable confluence of interrelated critical theories and perspectives that cross disciplines and applied fields, including: dependency, world systems, critical, neomarxist, economic reproduction, cultural reproduction, resistance, feminist standpoint, gender and development, socialist feminist, critical race, queer, intersection, critical postmodern, poststructural, postcolonial, and critical pedagogy. And this does not include all the related critical theories within each social science and applied field.

I am not saying that these theories offer identical perspectives, just that they share essential commonalities with respect to addressing the two major questions social theories face: "How do we understand our social world?" and "What can we do to change it?" In terms of understanding the world, most fundamentally, all these theories focus on marginalization. They see the world as composed of systems and structures that maintain, reproduce, and legitimate existing inequalities. From these perspectives, inequalities are not system failures but the logical consequence of successful system functioning. In terms of what to do, while most of these theories recognize that reproduction is pervasive, they also agree that there are serious challenges to reproduction. There is general agreement that those challenges have two interrelated sources. One is that the systems and structures that dominate are not monolithic but are pervaded by contradictions, such as that between the stated value of political democracy and the reality of economic authoritarianism, or that between the stated value of human equality and the reality of systematic inequity and discrimination. The other is a belief in human agency, in that oppression can be recognized and fought individually and collectively (see Klees, 2008b, for more details).

Brehm and Silova paint a picture of the progressive paradigm as no different than the neoliberal or liberal. To the contrary, most progressives would agree with the important points Brehm and

Silova make in their article. For example, they argue that equality must be the starting point for a new aid relationship, but:

[similar] to conservative efforts of education reform, critical pedagogy continues to see inequality as ‘a taken-for-granted, even obvious state of affairs to be confronted by the right mixtures of policies and praxis’ (Friedrich, Jaasted, & Popkewitz, 2010, p. 573). Ironically, it is this belief in the human ability to manage inequality that creates such stark similarities between the neoliberal, liberal, and progressive paradigms. (Brehm and Silova, 2010, p. 29)

While, at first glance, this may seem accurate in that all three paradigms recognize the existence of inequality, the progressive paradigm clearly recognizes the “equality of intelligence” and humanity that Brehm and Silova emphasize as essential. Paulo Freire, in developing critical pedagogy, clearly recognized the essential equality of teacher and student (Freire, 2005). And a progressive perspective does not see a “human ability to manage inequality,” but rather a struggle by those who are marginalized and their allies to confront inequality.

Similarly, Brehm and Silova (2010) paint an inaccurate portrait of a progressive paradigm on other important dimensions. First, they accuse it of “an unrelenting assumption that international development is linear, based on rationality and progressing towards a ‘better’ world for all” (p. 29). If anything, the progressive paradigm sees the exact opposite; capitalist development is not at all linear and is certainly not progressing towards a better world for all. Second, Brehm and Silova see in the progressive paradigm a “focus on education, empowerment, and participation as the means (not the ends) of international development initiatives” (p. 30). Again, the opposite is true for most progressives – education, empowerment, and participation are seen as important development ends. The boxes we use to classify perspectives are always problematic and it is easy to create straw persons. Brehm and Silova offer us some thoughtful perspectives on what is needed, but they should not be so quick to discard perspectives that complement theirs.

Capitalism and Development

Ginsburg (2010) faults me for not focusing on capitalism and for not sufficiently problematizing “development.” I agree. The term “development” or “developing” too often implies we are on a linear path to progress when we are far from that (as above). These terms are too often used in a narrow way to focus on economic growth. Ginsburg suggests that “one might want to try to rescue the term by referencing social democratic, socialist, eco-feminist, or sustainable human rights-based development” (p. 35). Other possibilities include participatory or local development.² Each of these terms captures elements from a progressive paradigm to qualify “development” but each has baggage of its own. For the present I use the term “development” because there are no good substitutes, but it always needs to be qualified.

The world system of capitalism is central to the problems facing development (Wallerstein, 1984). Capitalism is by no means our only problem. Patriarchy, racism and ethnic prejudice and hatred, heterosexism and homophobia, ableism, and other structures that support inequality and inhumanity intertwine. But capitalism is fundamentally different in at least one way. The other structures I mention are widely recognized as unfair, as violating human rights. On the other hand, capitalism, throughout much of the world, gets good press. Schoolchildren are taught its virtues. Ideologues portray it as the “one best system,” as the culminating point of history.

In my paper, when I talked of neoliberalism, I was talking about what has been dominant the

last 30 years, neoliberal capitalism (Klees, 2008a), and when I was talking about liberalism, I was talking about liberal capitalism that was dominant in many places from the 1930s to the 1970s. Some progressives, dismayed by the human and environmental destruction and inequalities associated with neoliberal capitalism, look to a return to the liberal past, with more attention to inequality and the necessity for the State to put limits on capitalism. But inequalities were rampant during the liberal era; the difference between liberal and neoliberal capitalism was more rhetoric than reality. As I implied above, under capitalism, poverty, inequality, and environmental destruction are not failures of the capitalist system, as they are usually seen. Instead, they are logical consequences of the system, the results of a well-functioning successful system. One might argue that, contrary to the ideologues, capitalism is one of the most inefficient political economic systems in history. In today's world, there are probably much more than two billion people who are unemployed or underemployed, living at the margins of our society. Capitalism is unable to create the opportunities that could make all these people an integral and valued part of our society, to the benefit of us all.

Ginsburg (2010) captures some of these issues in his wonderful game metaphor, contrasting winner-take-all Monopoly with his invented game, Utopia, which would "identify and mobilize all players' abilities to participate collectively in determining" needs (p. 36). In a Utopian world, Ginsburg goes on to say, "some of what is termed 'development assistance' or 'aid' – helping people to meet their needs and realize their rights – would become core activities of the system" (p. 36). While many would consider Ginsburg's version of Utopia an impossibility, there are many analyses and examples of how we are moving in that direction (Broad & Cavanagh, 2009; Hahnel, 2005; Alperovitz, 2004). I do not mean to be sanguine about the future as Ginsburg charges me. I said that the continuing global economic crisis raises further questions about the legitimacy of the capitalist system, but Ginsburg is correct that capitalism has faced and weathered many crises. Nonetheless, I am an optimist in that over time I see more and more people around the world striving to find and implement better alternatives.

Progressive versus Left Perspectives?

Kamat (2010) begins by saying that: "In fact, there is very little I disagree with in terms of the content of his [my] essay" (p. 43). I would say the same about her essay. What Kamat offers is a much deeper analysis of what a progressive or (as she calls it) "left radical" perspective means and what it implies for social transformation. In part, we have a difference of terminology, one that Kamat considers important. She, and some of the authors whom she cites, equates a progressive perspective with a liberal one. And indeed, today in the U.S. some liberals, President Obama being a very visible example, have taken to calling themselves progressives, given the neoliberal attack on the label "liberal." Nonetheless, the term "progressive" has a long historical lineage referring to more radical left views, and, as I indicated in the opening of this reply, I intended to use it in that way. Indeed, I made clear in my original article (Klees, 2010) that I was referring to much more than liberal versions of so-called progressive politics. I said:

a progressive perspective focuses on the reproductive nature of both the market and the State under current world system structures like capitalism, patriarchy, and racism, and puts greater reliance on transformation from below through more participatory forms of democracy and collective action. (p. 15)

Thus, I see Kamat adding to my argument more than offering a different direction. As I said, I don't disagree with the tenor of her argument, just with some of the details. Kamat objects to my finding some progressive elements in Ellerman (2005) and Riddell's (2007) books, and she makes

some good points. But Ellerman's critique of the World Bank and development and his respect for autonomy of those who are marginalized are not standard liberal fare, nor is Riddell's radical reconstruction of aid architecture.

Kamat (2010) spends some time elucidating the limitations of cash transfers to the poor, dismissing it as "distributing largesse" (p. 44). Admittedly, aid as largesse by the wealthy underlies neoliberal and liberal perspectives, and goes against the "equality" framework of Brehm and Silova, the "utopian" framework of Ginsburg, and the progressive/left radical framework of Kamat and myself. But that does not mean we should shut aid down nor not try to distribute aid in different forms. From a progressive perspective, today's gross inequalities of wealth are illegitimate – a result of colonialism, neocolonialism, unfair trade, and vastly unequal distribution of resources – and aid and cash transfers should be a right as long as the world system remains so unequal. Brazil's large-scale cash transfer programs, often upheld as a model, were the result of struggle by social movements that elected Lula as president and pushed for such policies, not largesse by the rich (Avritzer, 2009).

Kamat pushes for transformation that goes beyond aid policies. I agree, and I also did so in terms of arguing for participation as central, agreeing on certain development priorities, eliminating the World Bank and the IMF, and rethinking the over-emphasis on research (Klees, 2010). Kamat adds four considerations. First, the need for debt cancellation (which could be seen as largesse or the result of struggle). Second, the "right to livelihood." I have long argued that we will never have Education for All without Jobs for All (Klees, 2008b). Ginsburg points out how this right is central in the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. It is this right that is most destructive of the capitalist order which cannot and will not provide sustainable livelihoods for all. Third, Kamat points to the example of the Bank of the South as an alternative to the World Bank and IMF. Fourth, she argues that social movements are central to these and other attempts at social transformation. I agree that these four points are important, but others could be added. There is no blueprint for what a progressive world beyond capitalism might look like. From a progressive framework, we need both to envision alternatives and to struggle to collectively transform our world.

The Reality of Aid

Mundy (2010) questions my analysis when she asks how I and other critical scholars, herself included, can have it both ways. That is, "how can development assistance be both a key instrument of unequal social relations and part of a progressive solution?" (p. 49). But this is what contradictions are all about. Mundy seems to fault me for suggesting that:

one way of understanding aid policies is as a mechanism through which powerful states...legitimate their own power...; in the end, aid is structurally reduced to motives and incentives that mean it can never rise above being a bandage on human misery. (p. 50)

This is true, but only in part. In my paper, I am careful to point out that while reproduction of the social order is a strong feature of aid:

I am a firm believer that neoliberal policies are continually challenged by individuals, organizations, social movements, and left-of-center governments. The existence of aid and the MDGs represent real gains for the world's disenfranchised, as does, for example, the more participatory processes called for in PRSPs. However, in

this neoliberal era, these policies unfortunately bear little fruit. (Klees, 2010, p. 16)

In the end, Mundy (2010) seems to agree with me:

Development aid may therefore be seen not only as an expression of the ruling elites and their need for 'compensatory legitimization,' but also as the result of real pressures from wider social forces for greater and more real equality, domestically and abroad. (p. 50)

Mundy also argues that "to unpack foreign aid we need a much more complete theory of world politics and world order" (p. 49). In this regard, she signals the rise of "private sources of development aid," new institutional actors such as the Global Fund for Aids, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, and new State actors such as China. I agree these are important developments but they are well-known and do not change my analysis or the recommendations I drew from my analysis. In response to my using the Global Fund as an example of alternative mechanisms Mundy points to problems with the Global Fund's circumvention of government and its raising "the power of non-state actors with limited accountability to their funders" (p. 51). But those same weaknesses also embody strengths such as allowing for a more prominent role for civil society organizations and developing new approaches to accountability. A new and transformed world order needs new development mechanisms, and the Global Fund is one result of needed struggle and experimentation.

This last topic relates closely to Mundy's final comments that question two of my recommendations – the call for stronger forms of participation and the replacement of the World Bank and the IMF. We may not disagree about participation. Mundy's principal point is that what participation means in practice needs to pay attention to how it relates to "democratic and representative institutions of governance" (p. 51). I agree but would point out that how state and non-state actors relate is not decided by some rational allocation of roles, but rather reflects popular struggles for power and rights. Mundy also points out that participation is no "quick fix," which is certainly true (p. 51).

Where Mundy and I disagree is over the elimination of the Bank and the Fund. From my perspective, she offers a series of invalid excuses for maintaining the status quo: we are in a "major economic crisis;" given "contemporary world powers" it would be unlikely to replace the Bank with something "dramatically better;" and the Bank should be lauded for its transparency and accountability, its ability to deliver a "global social contract," and its advocacy for education. To the contrary, we are always in one sort of economic crisis or another and the Bank and the Fund follow neoliberal policies that resolve the crisis in the interests of the advantaged. It has been more than 60 years since the Bretton Woods agreement that created the Bank and the Fund. As Mundy would admit, we have a totally different world polity and social ethos. A new Bretton Woods conference would have a large array of new actors at the table with new perspectives on economics and aid. The struggle to define these new institutions would involve these new actors and could result in new institutions much more favorable to the developing world.

Also, contrary to Mundy's assertion, the Bank has very limited transparency and accountability. In whose interests is the social contract it delivers, and where has its advocacy for education gotten us? What kind of education and for whom? The goals of Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals will need to be postponed once again, for decades, if we proceed with business as usual. Moreover, education under the aegis of the Bank is dominated by exceedingly narrow

goals and measures. I pointed out in my paper how the Bank and the Fund – according to their own staff – are run by their neoliberal “thought police.” This is well-known to any longtime observer of these institutions. How can we possibly continue to have confidence in these institutions, which are run by one aberrant sect’s thought police? Mundy argues it is “irresponsible” to call for the replacement of these institutions without an alternative architecture in place.³ To the contrary, it is irresponsible to continue to support such ideological and problematic institutions.

Conclusion

While some could see much of this debate as semantics, it is not. The issue of whether we label our critique as progressive, left radical, or anti-capitalist is minor; it is the substance of the critique that matters, and the perspectives above combine to flesh out a profound critique of and alternative directions for our world system. These debates are not just about aid and education. They are about what kind of world do we now have, what kind of world do we want, and how can we get there.

The deprivations endured every day by so many mark how primitive and uncivilized we are. Savage and illegitimate income and wealth differences, determined principally by an accident of birth, decide who survives and how well. Future historians, if humanity manages to survive the profound crises we face, will look back at us and shake their heads in collective disgust at how so much knowledge could have been used so poorly. We have the resources and knowledge needed to transform our world system **now**, not in 30, 50, 100 years. We need to work on the politics.

Endnotes

1. I used the term “political economy” instead of “economics” to refer to all three perspectives. Even neoliberal and liberal political economy perspectives have cultural, political, and social dimensions in addition to economic ones.
2. Brehm and Silova question why I note that development should not become a strictly local phenomenon. The answer is that with 6+ billion people on the planet filled with technologies with pervasive impacts, the local and the global are inextricably intertwined. We can no more leave development to the local than we can to the global.
3. A new Bretton Woods conference could easily design an alternative architecture. I do not mean by this to say an alternative architecture will be easily agreed upon, since it will rightly be the object of considerable struggle between alternative political and economic views. But designing and implementing an alternative to the Bank and the Fund is an essential element in transforming our world system.

References

- Alperovitz, G. (2004). *America beyond capitalism: Reclaiming our wealth, our liberty, and our democracy*. New York: John Wiley.
- Avritzer, L. (2009). *Participatory institutions in democratic Brazil*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins.
- Brehm, W., & Silova, I. (2010). The ignorant donor: A radical reimagination of international aid, development, and education. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 13(1), 29-36.
- Broad, R., & Cavanagh, J. (2009). *Development redefined: How the market met its match*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

- Ellerman, D. (2005). *Helping people help themselves: From the World Bank to an alternative philosophy of development assistance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Friedrich, D., Jaastad, B., & Popkewitz, T. (2010). Democratic education: An (im)possibility that yet remains to come. *Education Philosophy and Theory*, 42(5-6), 571-587.
- Ginsburg, M. (2010). Improving aid effectiveness or transforming the global capitalist system. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 13(1), 37-43.
- Hahnel, R. (2005). *Economic justice and democracy: From competition to cooperation*. New York: Routledge.
- Kamat, S. (2010). The aid debate: Beyond the liberal/conservative divide. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 13(1), 44-50.
- Klees, S. (2008a). A quarter century of neoliberal thinking in education: Misleading analyses and failed policies. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 6(4), 311-348.
- Klees, S. (2008b). Reflections on theory, method, and practice in comparative and international education. *Comparative Education Review*, 52(3), 301-328.
- Klees, S. (2010). Aid, development, and education. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 13(1), 7-28.
- Mundy, K. (2010). Paradoxes and prospects: Moving beyond the study of foreign aid. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 13(1), 51-55.
- Riddell, R. (2007). *Does foreign aid really work?* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wallerstein, E. (1984). *The capitalist world-economy*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.